THE CHAPLAIN AND CASUALTIES IN ATOMIC COMBAT

"Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends."
John XV, 13

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Chaplain (Capt) James C. Carroll

In August of 1945 a momentous climax ended the great World War. Our Air Force dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan. Soon afterwards the Japanese signed an unconditional surrender aboard the famous battleship MISSOURI. A new era of modern warfare had begun. Historians will now refer to our century as the beginning of the Atomic Age.

In the years that followed, the military tacticians who prescribe policies of our Armed Forces, realized that atomic weapons would completely change the organizations and methods of our Army. Just three years ago their plans became a reality with the Pentomic Concept coming into being. Great development in nuclear warfare has been accomplished in recent months, the exploring of outer space and the perfecting of inter-continental missiles have increased the potential of atomic destruction.

The unbelievable destruction brought about by one atomic bomb was the basic cause for reorganizing our fighting units. In the modern battlefield dispersion is the key to success. To accomplish their ultimate missions of victory and survival, our fighting units must avoid concentration in a particular area. Otherwise, all will become quick casualties.

Our basic fighting unit is the division. With the above facts in mind the division has been reorganized with new potentials. Concepts of greater dispersion, mobility, fire power and long-range communications have been introduced. Our fighting men now will cover a much greater front. They will remain dispersed and well camouflaged. Long-range communications will maintain close unity throughout the combat area. Great fire power will reduce the needed manpower to hold the battle line.

Each and every unit and each and every man has been affected by the new Pentomic Concept. Each soldier in the Service is given careful instructions for success in the atomic battlefield. The Chaplain, as a key member

of the military team, should also be prepared to carry out his mission under such conditions. All should pray that an atomic war may never become a reality, but should it come, untold numbers of casualties will result from such warfare. Chaplains will be called upon to administer to untold thousands.

The author has been requested to describe the role of the Chaplain and casualties in atomic combat. The field is relatively unexplored. The tasks under such conditions are sometimes beyond imagination. I shall humbly try to point out a few most important considerations. Inasmuch as a fellow classmate is writing about the role of the Protestant Chaplain in an atomic situation, I shall limit my paper to the role of the Catholic Chaplain. We shall consider a Catholic Chaplain assigned to a division or preferably a battle group. The battle group forms the principal arm of a fighting division and many casualties will occur among the combat troops of a front line unit.

In the opening remarks about the new pentomic division I referred to four words which have become basic to modern warfare: Mobility, Dispersion, Fire Power and Long-Range Communications. These words can be most appropriately used in describing the efforts of a chaplain assigned to a battle group in atomic warfare. He will be called upon to carry out his ministrations over distant hills and wide areas. His zeal and energy will be sorely taxed for many men will seek his aid. When an actual atomic strike occurs, his area of actual coverage will be limited. Hence, his spiritual aid will many times be given from afar and before the actual danger is imminent.

For the above reasons great preparations, physical and spiritual, must be made by the chaplain and his men before they actually ever enter the combat zone. Every chaplain dedicated to God and the principles of his religion is schooled in the practice of sacrifice and prayer. He is ready to bring spiritual help to all in need. Each day he prays that he always will be effective in bringing God's mercy and peace to those in need. He is ready to

go without hesitation wherever human life is in danger. An Army Chaplain realizes that all troops are prepared for war. War brings many casualties. His daily religious devotions constantly keep him prepared. Especially with atomic combat in mind and with a knowledge of the actual destruction of nuclear bombs, a chaplain's preparations are ever present. He also has the responsibility of instilling the necessity for preparation in the minds of every soldier. During basic training and, subsequently, during regular training periods, soldiers are instructed on the effects and power of nuclear weapons. Somehow they fail to actually realize that some day they could be fighting under such conditions. Failing to realize the suddenness of nuclear action, they might delay their spiritual preparations for such an experience. The chaplains, in their sermons, character guidance lectures and counseling with their soldiers, could stress the need for constant preparation. Soldiers should be made to realize that they cannot wait until they become actual atomic casualties before they make peace with God. Because of the widespread battlefront, they will live and many times die alone on the atomic battlefield. With these thoughts in mind the chaplain attempts to offer Holy Mass and administer the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist as frequently as possible before the unit is committed to combat. If it is impossible to hear each and every Catholic man's confession and combat is imminent, the Catholic Chaplain may grant general absolution and exhort his men to make frequent acts of contrition while in battle. He also should attempt to develop individual devotions among his men. Frequently, solitary prayer will be a most fitting preparation for atomic combat.

We now consider the tasks of a Catholic Chaplain once his battle group is committed to actual combat. He still attempts to visit as many units and individual men as possible. Daily Mass can be offered in isolated or well

concealed areas. Attendance at these daily devotions will be low. Because of dispersion and the danger of nuclear attack, Commanders will forbid large units from gathering in one area. Aside from his daily visitations, during which time he always should inform the Adjutant of his whereabouts, the Catholic Chaplain is customarily found around the Aid Station. Almost every casualty is brought here and the Chaplain is more universally available to the wounded. When a seriously wounded soldier is brought to the Aid Station and the Chaplain learns that he is of the Catholic Faith, he will help the soldier make a good confession and then administer the last Sacraments. Whenever he administers to the wounded, the Chaplain complies with paragraphs 33 and 91 of AR 40-400, which concerns the EMT and religious preference. The Chaplain is permitted to mark on the EMT, in abbreviated form, the religious preference and the Sacraments administered. Besides his spiritual ministrations, the Chaplain should be most willing to help the personnel in the Aid Station, in rendering medical aid to the wounded. Medical Aid Station personnel are most impressed with Chaplains who tirelessly assist in giving physical comfort to the wounded and then helping the aid men carry the stretchers to the ambulance.

In case of an actual atomic strike, the Chaplain should be ready to go without hesitation to the scene of the nuclear attack. Before proceeding, he might, if possible, attempt to notify the Division Chaplain. We shall speak more of the Division Chaplain at a later time. I mention him now because, upon notification, he will be ready to apply his area coverage plan in an atomic situation. In describing the Chaplain's arrival on the scene, we are presupposing that the area has been cleared for entrance. Great numbers of casualties will be found. Many will be dead. Many others will be near the point of death. These seriously wounded will be the Chaplain's first consideration.

If it is impossible to speak personally to all the seriously wounded, the Chaplain can again grant general absolution within the area. Besides the seriously wounded, some 30% of the soldiers in the area will be near the point of panic or hysteria. The Chaplain can attempt to quiet their nerves and restore their confidence by his presence and consoling words. He can reassure his men that they are well and able to assist their comrades.

At this time it might be well to say a few words about the sorting of casualties in an atomic situation. The Medical Corps has developed four words in explaining the sorting of atomic casualties.[1] Under the term "triage" medical teams will classify casualties as: Minimal, Delayed, Remedial or Expectant. The Expectant are those closest to death; those for whom medical help is not effective. These we listed as the Chaplain's first consideration. Their help will be supportive in nature. The Chaplain prepares them to meet God in Judgment. The Minimal casualties are those who need counseling and reassurance. These also will many times require the Chaplain's attention. The other two categories of casualties are Delayed and Remedial. They will survive evacuation to the rear and receive the spiritual ministrations of other chaplains, should the battle group chaplain find it impossible to render them assistance at the scene of the strike.

Should the area be contaminated or alive with radioactivity, the Chaplain might not be able to enter immediately and he again will administer general absolution from afar. When entrance is possible, he will be unable many times to physically touch the wounded. Catholic Chaplains can administer the last rites and annoint a soldier with the holy oils by placing a small piece of cotton at the end of a twig.[2] A word should be said at this time about the Catholic Chaplain's supply of sacred oils and other religious items necessary

1 - Notes from Course in Mass Casualty Evacuation - Walter Reed General Hospital, 9-14 September 1957

2 - Handbook of Moral Theology - Brown page 79

for his personal ministrations. The great number of casualties will require abnormal amounts of these supplies which the Chaplain or his assistant should try to carry with them. Actually the sacred oils take up but a small space. An extra vial should last a long time. In describing the Catholic Chaplain's efforts at the time of an atomic burst we should also mention the invaluable help that can be rendered by his assistant. He will be, insofar as possible, the Chaplain's constant companion. He can help carry supplies and also find other soldiers who need immediate assistance. His courage and example in bravery can be an invaluable aid to the Chaplain. The assistant, of course, will not administer any Sacraments, but he can help the wounded in praying and preparing to receive the Sacraments.

We can now offer a few suggestions concerning a Chaplain's role after an atomic danger has passed. I use this term loosely because the danger perhaps will be ever present. Presupposing all casualties have been evacuated, a Chaplain may be called upon to aid in mass burial services. He should be well acquainted with the procedures of the recovery and disposition team and generously give them his assistance. He also will continue his prayers and concern for those evacuated to the rear. A knowledge of the chain of evacuation will help him locate many men of his unit now in rear areas. Although they are no longer with their buddies up front, these soldiers will be anxious to learn of their safety. Hospital Chaplains will generously visit their bedside, but their unit chaplain will still bring them the greatest consolation. He can inform these soldiers that their comrades are offering many prayers in their behalf. He also can ask them to offer their sufferings, with a deep spirit of sacrifice, in union with the sufferings of Christ on the Cross of Calvary. During the Korean conflict I recall a beautiful prayer card which I distributed to many men, especially those who had been wounded and were about to spend many months in the hospital. The prayer was a perfect act of resignation and love.

I urged the soldiers to repeat the words many times each day. It read as as follows:

"I kiss the wounds of Thy Sacred Head
With sorrow deep and true
May every thought of mine today
Be an act of love for You.

"I kiss the wounds of Thy Sacred Hands
With sorrow deep and true
May every touch of mine today
Be an act of love for You.

"I kiss the wounds of Thy Sacred Feet
With sorrow deep and true
May every step of mine today
Be an act of love for You.

"I kiss the wounds of Thy Sacred Side
With sorrow deep and true
May every beat of my heart today
Be an act of love for You."
Fr. Declan Fallon C.P.

The doctrine of the Communion of Saints in the Catholic Church teaches that all members can assist others by offering private penance and prayers in their behalf. The unit chaplain may assure his men of his personal daily prayers and sacrifice in their behalf. If possible, a promise of a reassuring letter to their loved ones can be offered.

A discussion of casualty coverage in atomic warfare would not be complete without a word about the great need for area coverage in modern warfare. The Division Chaplain as a supervisor of 17 other chaplains in the Infantry Division should carefully prepare a detailed plan for adequate coverage in any possible situation. I have presupposed that the Battle Group Chaplain has survived an atomic attack. However, he himself could very well become a casualty. In such an event, other chaplains must quickly come to the aid of this crippled fighting unit. The supervisor will draw from either the reserve or rear area units and quickly provide spiritual assistance for the wounded soldiers. The greatest consolation any chaplain can have in future combat will be the knowledge that his fellow chaplains are always ready to come to his aid. He is strengthened to carry

out his mission of administering to as many as possible, reassured that he is a member of a united spiritual team.

It is truly difficult to attempt to describe the functions of a chaplain in covering the many casualties in atomic warfare. We can only attempt to amplify the basic responsibilities of casualty coverage. Experience, normally our greatest teacher, is lacking. The basic role remains the same, that of bringing spiritual consolation to as many as possible. The author actually shudders at the thought of the utter helplessness which perhaps would overcome him in an atomic situation on the battlefield.

The key to casualty coverage, to my way of thinking, is prior planning at all echelons of the military. Each member of the Armed Forces should be ever prepared to give a quick account for his life. Christ, Our Lord, Himself, taught us that each day is a stepping stone to heaven. Our most important task is to keep our soul ever prepared for Particular Judgment. We try to be concerned not so much with the manner of death as with the status of our soul at the time of death. Many follow the philosophy of waiting until a later time in life to prepare for death. Yet in the words of Peter[3], "we know not the day nor the hour for death will come like a thief in the night." That thief could very well be delivered by an atomic missile. Hence, I shall fervently pray that an atomic war never becomes a reality. At the same time I shall encourage our American soldiers and civilians to know the capabilities of the Atomic Age, while daily preparing their souls to meet its tremendous challenge.

3 - 2 Peter 3:10

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